



Political Ads & Local TV News Philly 2014



Pennsylvania State Education Funding
Source: PA Department of Education

Danilo Yanich Philly Political Media Watch

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March 2015



The front cover contains screenshot images from some of the political ads that appeared on the broadcasts that we examined. They were accessed from Internet Archive.

Starting from the top:

Image #1

0:20/0:30

Sponsor: Aimee Belgard for Congress

https://archive.org/details/WPVI_20141103_230000_Action_News_600_PM?q=%3A*#start/888.8/end/919.6

Accessed on March 10, 2015

Image #2

0:02/0:30

Sponsor: Aimee Belgard for Congress

https://archive.org/details/WPVI_20141103_230000_Action_News_600_PM?q=%3A*#start/888.8/end/919.6

Accessed on March 10, 2015

Image #3

0:08/0:30

Sponsor: Chris Coons for Delaware

https://archive.org/details/KYW_20140930_110000_CBS_This_Morning#start/6702/end/6732.7

Accessed on March 10, 2015

Image #4

0:17/0:28

Sponsor: Tom Corbett for Governor

https://archive.org/details/WPVI_20140916_100000_Action_News#start/3272.8/end/3301.7

Accessed on March 10, 2015

Image #5

Sponsor: Tom Wolf for Governor

https://archive.org/details/WCAU_20140926_223000_NBC_Nightly_News#start/915.1/end/945.7

Accessed on March 10, 2015

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Acknowledgements

This was a large research endeavor and it benefitted from the talents of wonderful colleagues. First, this research could not have been conducted without the graduate and undergraduate student coders from the University of Delaware's School of Public Policy & Administration who watched and meticulously coded every minute of the broadcasts. Ally Becker supervised that entire effort. Her insight, attention to detail and dedication to the integrity of the research ooze all through this work. Valerie Lane, Gemma Tierney, Sarah Fulton, Jessica Stump and Nicholas Brock engaged the rigor of the research with enthusiasm, curiosity and a commitment to getting it right. I owe them more than I can say.

This was a unique project that required the collaboration among crucial partners and it has been my honor to work with them. Together, we formed the Philly Political Media Watch Project. Roger Macdonald of Internet Archive made it possible to view every newscast and political ad that was broadcast during the campaign. That was never available to any researcher previously. Not only that, Roger functioned as our leader. Kathy Kiely of Sunlight Foundation counted the money. She and her colleagues provided all of the analysis of the cost of every political ad, contract and TV spot that occurred during the fall campaign. Kathy also wrote the executive summary to this report, condensing much material into a concise package. Ellen Kaplan and Pat Christmas of the Committee of Seventy brought the public interest experience and the reputation of that remarkable organization to the project. In addition, Committee of Seventy volunteers provided invaluable assistance to the coding of political ads. But, each of those wonderful people brought much more to the project. We had many long discussions in which the specific issues of the project were cast within the larger issues of the public interest and democracy. Yes, the kind of discussions that get your heart to beat. I was the beneficiary of their insight, their curiosity and their passion. I am grateful.

The project received crucial funding from the Democracy Fund and the Rita Allen Foundation. We could not have done the work without the goodwill and critical support of the Democracy Fund and the Rita Allen Foundation. They believed in what the project could accomplish. We owe them our sincere gratitude.

The front cover of the report is the result of a collaboration between Ally Becker and Sarah Pragg, graphic designer for the Institute of Public Administration here in the School of Public Policy & Administration. I realized that my efforts at such a task were woefully inadequate. Ally suggested that we ask Sarah, who volunteered her time on a moment's notice. Her skill is evident. Her generosity is appreciated.

I would also like to thank Paul Ruiz, a graduate of our MA program in Urban Affairs & Public Policy and my co-author on a previous monograph in which we examined political ads and local news in Honolulu during the 2012 Presidential campaign. Paul's work in that research provided much guidance in my approach in this work.

My university colleague, Dr. Steven Peuquet, Director of the Center for Community Research & Service has always supported the media policy work with the Center's resources, but more importantly, he has been a crucial sounding board for my ideas. The give-and-take of our discussions is infused throughout the research. I thank him for his insight.

--dy

March 2015

Abstract

Political advertising is a structural feature of American political campaigns. That has become more prevalent with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* in 2010. The vast majority of that advertising comes in the form of political ads that are shown on local television stations. In fact, in the Presidential election of 2012, local TV stations received over \$2.9 billion (80%) of political ad spending.

During the final two months of the 2014 mid-term election, the citizens in the Philadelphia television market saw nearly 12,000 political ads that cost their sponsors \$14.4 million. Two-thirds of these ads were presented on news programs. The political ads, by definition, raise questions about public issues that the candidates think will resonate with voters. Given these circumstances, an obvious question is to what extent are those public issues covered by the local news operations of the stations on which the ads appear. This study examined that question in the Philadelphia television market during the 2014 mid-term election. Who bought the ads? What did they say? Were those issues reflected in news coverage during the campaign? How many ads were broadcast? How many political stories? Did the stations critically examine the claims that were made on the ads to provide citizens with non-biased information? What did the public learn?

Executive Summary

In the final eight weeks before Election Day 2014, six broadcast television stations that serve the Philadelphia metro area benefitted from a \$14.4 million bonanza in political ads. Over that same period those stations aired fewer than 19 minutes of substantive political stories – those devoted to actual campaign issues as opposed to news of candidate appearances.

This startling finding is the result of Philly Political Media Watch, an unprecedented collaboration among computer scientists, academics, civic activists and journalists and the deployment of cutting-edge technology. The effort has provided the most detailed and authoritative study ever produced on the types of political communications that were – and were not – served up to voters in the nation's fourth largest television market during the crucial closing weeks of a mid-term election campaign. Together with recent studies such as that of the Pew Center, it suggests a disturbing trend in which propaganda and profit have been allowed to trump the public interest.

Underwritten by nonpartisan foundations – the Democracy Fund, the Rita Allen Foundation– the study found that the during the last two months of the campaign:

Candidates and third party advertisers spent \$14.4 million buying time of Philadelphia stations to air some 12,000 commercials;

By far the largest number of those ads – just over 8,000 – aired during news programs, underlining the importance campaign strategists put on that news programming as a medium for influencing voters;

Political news stories, meanwhile, got far less airtime: an examination of news programming from Sept. 8 through Election Day showed that Philadelphia-area viewers were exposed to four times as much political advertising as political journalism during news broadcasts.

The disparity grew even wider when researchers separated stories that dealt with substantive campaign issues from those that related basic information such as candidate schedules or polling place information. The ratio of news hour time devoted

to paid political advertising compared to that devoted to political issue stories: 45 to 1.

Conducted in a television market that covers portions of three states – Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, the study illuminates trends that are particularly disturbing as Americans prepare for a 2016 presidential election that will be hotly contested and awash in money.

But the work also suggests ways in which the balance can be tipped in favor of public knowledge. In Philadelphia, innovative partnerships, open data and new technology that can help voters learn more about who is trying to influence their vote and why. In Philadelphia, the venerable good government organization Committee of Seventy enlisted volunteers to help enter and analyze key data for the project. The Internet Archive, borrowing facilities provided by the University of Pennsylvania's Linguistics Data Consortium, recorded and preserved 390 television broadcasts for analysis by the University of Delaware. The Sunlight Foundation provided tools and journalists to analyze Federal Communications Commission records of political ad buys, contracts that contain key information about organizations – even those that are not required to disclose donors. In the process, all of the organizations discovered new methods for advancing their work and hastening the flow of information to voters in real time.

This could be especially significant in future elections. By fall in the Philadelphia region, the number of truly competitive races has dwindled to a handful. But in another season or another venue, where more outside groups are involved, contract information could be crucial in tracing “dark” money – the kind that comes from groups that don't have to identify their donors.

Major technical achievements of the project include the development of a method for training machines to help identify political ads in a TV broadcast and the beginnings of a method for automatically putting information on PDF forms filed with the Federal Communications Commission into machine-readable format. These breakthroughs promise to make this project

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Introduction

There is more money in American politics than ever before. We have been able to say that in every election since 2000 and, in all likelihood, that will be the case in future elections. In 2000, the total cost of the election (presidential and congressional races) was about \$3.1 billion. By 2012, that total had more than doubled to \$6.3B (Choma, 2013). That trend continued to the 2014 midterm election which was the most expensive midterm in history—about \$3.67 billion (Center for Responsive Politics, 2014).

The unprecedented increase in money in campaigns is directly linked to the 2010 *Citizens United v FEC* Supreme Court decision. That decision gave rise to the creation of super PACS that could receive unlimited contributions from corporate and union organizations as well as from individuals. But, another decision, *McCutcheon v FEC* in April 2014, removed aggregate limits for individual donors giving to candidates, political parties and PACs. When the decision was announced, there was concern that it would pave the way for “deep-pocketed” donors to contribute to joint fundraising committees (JFCs) that represent various candidates who would split the single massive check. The 2014 midterm election manifested the McCutcheon effect. The number of individual donors who gave more than \$200 dropped by almost 20 percent from 2012. Elite donors contributed over \$168 million to JFCs with the top five donors giving \$1.9 million (Choma, 2014).

In 2012, candidate Barack Obama spent \$333M to present almost 561,000 political ads on television. His opponent, Mitt Romney, spent \$147 million to present over 223,500 ads. That does not count the money that SuperPACs and other groups spent on their behalf. (Washington Post/Kantar Media, 2012). These political ads appeared on traditional media as they dominated ad revenues and television alone “remains the gold standard for political advertising” (Owen, 2013, p. 110). Speaking about televised political advertisements, senior Obama campaign strategist David Axelrod affirmed, “It’s still the nuclear weapon” (Nichols & McChesney, 2013, p. 138).

Political ads are a structural feature of American campaigns and they are an extremely effective tool of political communication (Nichols & McChesney, 2013; Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Purcell & Rainie, 2011). Campaigns control the message that the public and, in some measure, the press see regarding their candidate. The sheer ubiquity of the ads is evidence of their effectiveness. For the 2014 midterm elections of governors, the U.S. House of Representatives

and the US Senate, just under \$1.2 billion was spent to present over 2.2 million political ads. Further, 600,000 of those ads were sponsored by groups who used “dark money”—they did not disclose their donors. If we include all races and ballot measures, the totals jump to \$1.675 billion and just under 3 million ads (Wesleyan Media Project, 2014).

The influx of political ad spending has created something of an information imbalance. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), local markets are seeing a deluge of political advertisements. These ads inundate citizens with an onslaught of issue information. And these ads appear, for the most

The **influx** of political ad spending has created something of an **information imbalance**.

part, on local television news programs. Therefore, local news frequently presents political information to the same audience that watches political ads. There is an obvious

question—does local television news critically examine the claims that are made on the ads that appear on their broadcasts. To what extent do local television newscasts practice journalism as represented by political stories that cover the same issues that appear on political ads? This research investigated the content of news programming and political advertisements at the intersection of two important political and economic phenomena: the consolidation of local broadcast news, and the proliferation of political advertisements on local television. We directed our attention to the epicenter of political advertising placement: local television news programs. We examined the newscasts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during the 2014 midterm elections because it represented a large television market (#4 in size), it has a diverse population and there were important state (governor) and Federal campaigns (U.S. House of Representatives).

Philly Political Media Watch

This project was a unique collaboration and it was only possible because each of the partners brought distinct contributions to the table. The principals were Internet Archive based in San Francisco, Sunlight Foundation, based in Washington, D.C., the Committee of Seventy, based in Philadelphia and the Center for Community Research & Service in the School of Public Policy & Administration at the University of Delaware. We realized from the beginning that an examination of political ads, news and money was only possible if we combined our capacities. To that end, Internet Archive (IA) provided access to every news program that was broadcast in the Philadelphia market during the election period. Further, Internet Archive volunteers catalogued every political ad that appeared on the air. Through special Internet links, IA made that

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content available for us to conduct our coding. The level of content that was available to us for examination has never been possible previously.

Sunlight Foundation produced a massive amount of information regarding the money behind the political ads. Through painstaking and ground-breaking analyses, the foundation's developers and journalists were able to transform mounds of cost data from the stations, from the FCC and from state of Pennsylvania into a picture of who bought what, for how much, when and from whom. Sunlight put specific and real numbers on the actual costs of political ads and, in so doing, gave us a unique view into the operations of the stations that presented them.

The Committee of Seventy is a non-profit, non-partisan organization established in 1904 to combat corruption in Philadelphia. It is now one of the most respected comprehensive good government groups in the nation. The Committee of Seventy used its good offices to provide volunteers to help both Sunlight Foundation and Internet Archive to accomplish their work. In addition, the Committee of Seventy offered the project insight into the political map of the Philadelphia market.

The Center for Community Research & Service in the School of Public Policy & Administration at the University of Delaware examined the relationship between the political ads and the content of local television news programs on which the ads appeared. The project staff systematically and minutely examined 390 newscasts (representing 300 hours) to determine how much airtime was devoted to substantive political news. This report presents the findings of that effort.

Political Ads and Local TV

Political advertisements are the most potent "weapon" in campaigns and their deployment is a crucial consideration. In that regard, political ads are virtually the province of local television. During the 2014 mid-term election, 95 percent of political ads were presented on local television stations. That was up from 92 percent in 2012 (Matsa, 2014). In order to accomplish that, political sponsors spent \$1.3 billion on local TV commercial time from January through mid-October 2014 (Matsa, 2014). That is "serious" money by any calculation.

During the 2012 election, any station with a transmission signal that reached an electorally competitive audience saw a boost in ad revenue, as did its parent company. The E.W. Scripps Company, which reaches 13 percent of U.S. households, reported a 41 percent increase in revenue over the third

quarter of 2011. Sinclair Broadcasting Group, which reaches 35¹ percent of U.S. households, widened profit margins by 49 percent and nationwide, local station profits increased by 38 percent over 2010, and almost doubled over 2008 (Potter, Matsa & Mitchell, 2013). While political advertising dollars seem to double every election cycle, the pool of beneficiaries shrinks. In 1996, there were 1,130 commercial television stations with 450 owners. By 2010, there were one third fewer owners and 172 more stations (Federal Communications Commission, 2010).

Local television news broadcasts presumably attract large audiences because citizens want to know about news that directly affects them and their communities.

What really **mattered**---was **local news**. True
swing state voters watched their local TV station.

---David Plouffe, Obama Campaign Mgr, 2009

Obama campaign manager David Plouffe (2009) recounts, “What really mattered—and our research was clear as a bell on this—was local news. True

swing state voters watched their local TV station and read their regional paper” (p. 315). Indeed, Rosenstiel et al. (2011) found that political news stories are the third most demanded story type, next to weather and breaking news.

¹ According to their website, the Sinclair Broadcasting Group reached 37.5 percent of TV households in the U.S. as of March 2015.

Local TV News

Television news remains the critical news source of information for the American public about their localities. Even in the age of the Internet, almost eight of ten Americans get their news from a local television station (Waldman, 2011). The Pew Research Journalism Project found that almost three-fourths (71%) of U.S. adults view local TV news over the course of a month (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell & Enda, 2013). That compared to 65 percent and 38 percent for network news and cable news, respectively. To be sure, Pew also found that cable news viewers spent about twice as much time as local TV news viewers consuming news (25.3 vs 12.3 minutes per day, respectively). However, they made a distinction between heavy, medium and light news viewers. And, heavy news viewers regularly consume news across all three platforms (Olmstead, et.al., 2013). Moreover, even as engagement with news media is in decline (except for digital/mobile), almost half of the public (48%) indicated they regularly watched local TV news, more than all other media (Pew Research Center, 2012). Even across different types of television markets, local news matters to local residents as nine out of ten follow local news closely. Further, residents are involved in the local news process in varying ways, but to those who are most politically active, local news is vital (Pew Research Center, 2015).

In many ways, **local TV news** is more **important** than **ever**. --FCC, 2011.

reference in twice as many conversations throughout the day" (TVB, 2013b, p. 5). The point is that local TV news remains a strong

player in the news consumption activities of citizens (TVB, 2013a). Indeed, the Federal Communications Commission's seminal study of the information needs of communities concluded that, "In many ways, local TV news is more important than ever" (Waldman, 2011, p. 13).

Local television news maintains **the** prominent place in the political information calculus of citizens across the ideological spectrum. Almost half (49%) of those surveyed used the medium as a source of news about politics and government in the previous week (Table 1). Further, local TV news retains its prominence

within each of the ideological groups identified by the Pew Research Center. It is either the primary or secondary source (capturing at least half of the audience) for four out of the five groups. Only for the group identified as “consistently liberal” does it place third, reaching 39 percent (Table 1).

Table 1: % who got news about politics & government in the previous week from...

Total		Consistently liberal		Mostly liberal		Mixed		Mostly conservative		Consistently conservative	
Local TV	49	NPR	53	Local TV	50	Local TV	51	Fox News	61	Fox News	84
CNN	44	CNN	52	CNN	48	CNN	49	Local TV	50	Local TV	50
Fox News	39	Local TV	39	NBC News	44	ABC News	42	ABC News	32	Hannity (radio)	45
NBC News	37	MSNBC	38	ABC News	38	NBC News	40	CNN	32	Limbaugh	43
ABC News	37	NBC News	37	MSNBC	32	Fox News	39	NBC News	29	Beck (radio)	34

Source: <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/section-1-media-sources-distinct-favorites-emerge-on-the-left-and-right/#the-long-tail>.

Local TV Consolidation

The consolidation of local television stations has reached epic proportions. In 2012 only 95 stations were sold for a total of \$1.9 billion. In 2013 that number increased over 300 percent (290 stations) at over four times the dollar value (\$8.8 billion). Further, joint service agreements (in which one station takes over the functions of another station in the same market) now operate in 94 out of the 210 television markets, an increase from 55 in 2011 (Potter & Matsa, 2014). This consolidation is acute among the affiliates of the four networks (ABC, CBS, NBC & Fox)---the stations on which the overwhelming majority of local news is presented. In the top 100 DMAs (Designated Market Areas as established by Nielsen Media), which contain 86% of all U.S. TV households, 18 companies control 77% of these stations (Turner, 2014). Put more starkly, five companies own almost one-third of the 1,400 local television stations in the US (Matsa & Potter, 2014). Further, one in four local stations does not produce the news content that it presents, a drop of eight percent since 2005 (Papper, 2013). The pace of consolidation led Nextar President Perry Sook to predict the landscape of future of local television ownership in bold terms:

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I would think that within two to five years, you'll see the emergence of what I call three or four super-groups. Those companies will continue to drive the business, while those that are sub-scale will choose [to sell and] not to be a house by the side of the road as the parade passes by (Malone, 2013).

There are two factors that have driven this wave of consolidation—both of which are economic. The unprecedented growth in political advertising has been a boon to local stations (Family, 2013). Media conglomerates know that political ad purchases flood local markets every two years. In Washington,

I would think that within **two to five years**, you'll see the emergence of what I call **three or four super-groups**. --Perry Sook, Nextar President, 2013

where transmission signals reach the D.C. suburbs in Virginia, local stations raked in \$74 million in political ads in 2012 (Washington Post/Kantar Media, 2012). A second economic impetus is

retransmission fees—the payment that local stations receive from cable operators to “retransmit” their content. In 2012 that total was \$327 million, half of which went to the local station’s parent network and half (about \$176 million) was captured by local television stations as additional revenue for news gathering efforts (Holcomb & Mitchell, 2014).

The Philadelphia TV Market

As of the 2014-2015 television season, the Philadelphia television market consisted of 2,953,760 television households and it was ranked number 4 out of the 210 television markets (DMAs) in the United States as determined by Nielsen Media Research. The market consists of a total of nineteen counties in southeast Pennsylvania, southeastern New Jersey and northern Delaware. There are four stations in the market that either solely produce and deliver daily local news broadcasts. Philadelphia is one of the few markets in which each of the major network affiliates is owned by the network. The parent owners of the Philadelphia stations represent some of the largest (as measured by revenue) firms in the U.S. That means that the stations in Philadelphia are part of the station groups of four out of the top seven station groups in the country, as measured by revenue in 2013.

KYW (CBS) is owned by CBS Corp., the second largest broadcast group in the nation with 2013 revenue of \$1.5 billion. It owns 30 stations in 18 television markets and reaches 38.9 percent of the nation, just below the 39 percent limit imposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). WCAU (NBC) is owned by the NBC Universal, the fifth largest station group in the country with revenue in 2013 of \$1.3 billion. It owns 10 stations in 10 markets. It reaches 36 percent of the TV households in the U.S. In 2013, Comcast bought 51 percent of NBC Universal from its parent owner, General Electric, for \$16.7 billion. WPVI (ABC) is owned by the Walt Disney Company network, the fourth largest station group with 8 stations in 8 markets and revenue in 2013 of \$1 billion. It reaches 23 percent of the nation's TV households. WTXF (Fox) is owned by the 21st Century Fox, the number one station group in the U.S. with revenues of \$1.7 billion in 2013. It controls 28 stations in 18 markets, reaching 37% of the national audience (Miller, 2014).

There are two other stations that also deliver a daily local newscast, but they do so in association with one of the major network affiliated stations. WPHL (MyTV) is owned by the Tribune Company and has a news sharing agreement with WPVI. Since September 2012, WPHL has produced its own weekday 10pm broadcast using the staff of WPVI's 4pm newscast. WPSG (CW) is the duopoly station with KYW with which it shares studio and office facilities.

The Philadelphia Election Campaign

The 2014 midterm election included several important races for the Philadelphia television market. We report the results of races that appeared in political ads on newscasts in the market.

Pennsylvania

The campaign for governor featured a Democratic challenger (Tom Wolf) to the incumbent Republican (Tom Corbett). Wolf, a businessman from York, Pennsylvania, used his considerable wealth to achieve and sustain a lead among the Democratic primary candidates. Wolf flooded the airwaves with political ads very early in the primary season. He continued during the general election and defeated the sitting governor by 10 percentage points (55% to 45%). It was the first time that an incumbent governor was denied a second term in Pennsylvania since 1968 when a constitutional change allowed governors to seek re-election.

Except for the Governor's race, Republicans defeated their Democratic opponents in every other race in Pennsylvania (U.S. House of Representatives, state Senate and state General Assembly) for which political ads appeared in the Philadelphia market. The striking feature about the races was that many were not seriously competitive. Despite that fact, Philly stations still saw a bonanza of ad spending, with one race for a state Senate seat adding about \$2 million to the total spending for ads. It is clear that candidates and interest groups were willing to spend significant amounts of money even for local races that were not very close.

In the 6th Congressional District, Ryan Costello won handily over Manan Trivedi (56%-44%). In the 8th Congressional District, Michael Fitzpatrick won over Kevin Strouse (62%-38%).

Races for the state Senate in Pennsylvania yielded the following results. In the 6th Senatorial District, Republican Robert Tomlinson defeated Democrat Kimberly Yeager-Rose, defeated 62%-38%. In the 26th Senatorial District, Republican Thomas McGarrigle defeated Democrat John Kane, 52%-48%. This was also a race for an open seat and drew an eye-popping amount of ads. We found that the two candidates and their PAC supporters spent a combined \$2 million to win the seat. In the 40th Senatorial District, Republican Mario Scavella defeated Democrat Mark Aurand, 60%-40%.

In the races for Representatives in the General Assembly the results were: 146th Legislative District, Thomas Quigley (Rep) defeated Mark Painter (Dem), 52%-48%; 157th Legislative District, Warren Kampf (Rep) defeated Marian

Moskowitz (Dem), 55%-45%; 163rd Legislative District, James Santora (Rep) defeated Vincent Rongione (Dem), 54%-46%.

New Jersey

In New Jersey Republicans won two of the three races for the U.S. House of Representatives that posted political ads the the Philly market. In the 1st Congressional District, Democrat Donald Norcross defeated Republican Garry Cobb, 57%-39%. Despite the lopsided margin and the heavily Democratic tilt of the district, Norcross, a member of a politically well-connected family, was taking no chances in his bid for the open seat. Between Sept. 1 and Election Day, he spent more than \$985,000 advertising on Philadelphia TV stations. In the 2nd Congressional District, Frank LoBiondo (Rep) defeated William Hughes, Jr (Dem), 61%-37%. In the 3rd Congressional District, Tom McArthur (Rep) defeated Aimee Belgard (Dem), 54%-44%. This race was for an open seat (incumbent Rep. Jon Runyan, a Republican, retired). It drew the most significant "dark money" (from organizations who did reveal the sources of the money) of any of the races in the Philly market. Two GOP-allied groups, the American Action Network and Crossroads GPS, combined to spend more than \$1.1 million on negative ads targeting Belgard.

In the race for Burlington County Freeholder, Republicans Bruce Garganio and Mary Ann O'Brien (27% and 26%, respectively) defeated Democrats Tom Pullion and Michael Schmidt (24% and 24%, respectively). The Freeholder race in Gloucester County was won by Democrats Adam Taliaferro (22%), Heather Simmons (22%) and Lyman Barnes (21%) over Republicans Joe Bennis (18%), Jeanine Butterworth-Green (18%) and Jack Scheidell (18%).

Delaware

In Delaware, Democrat Chris Coons retained his Senate seat defeating Republican Kevin Wade, 56%-42%.

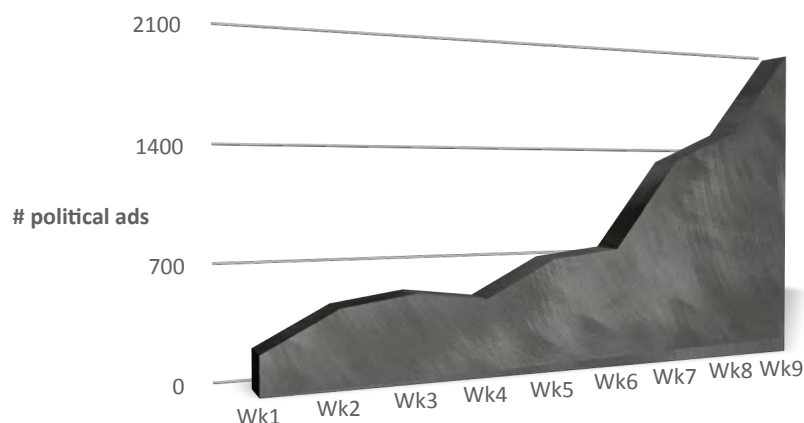
Political Ads

The collaboration of two partners in the Philly Political Media Watch project produced a clear picture of the prevalence and cost of political ads in the Philadelphia market. Sunlight Foundation found that, during the nine weeks of the campaign from September 1st through November 3rd, the six stations that formed the sample of this research accepted contracts worth a total of \$14,430,122 to broadcast 11,937 political ads. But, very importantly, Internet Archive found that the vast majority of the ads (67%, n=8,003) were presented on news programs. That is a crucial point for this research. Even though the stations had a very long broadcast day during which to present these ads, political sponsors insisted on news programs as the major vehicle to deliver their messages. The contracts for the ads specified the types of programs, as well as dates, times and frequency of the ad on the broadcasts of each station. Clearly, political campaigns placed their faith, and a very large portion of their money, in news programs, underscoring the importance of those broadcasts as a vehicle of political communication.

Political Ads: When during the campaign?

As we might expect, the presentation frequency of the 8,003 political ads changed over the course of the campaign. During the first week of September, the stations broadcast a total of 233 ads. By week 9, that total was almost tenfold, 2046 ads (Fig. 1).

Fig.1: Distribution of political ads during the campaign



Political Ads: Where?

The political ads were not equally distributed across the stations---there were clear winners in the political ad sweepstakes. WCAU (the NBC affiliate) broadcast over one-fourth (27%) of the political ads over the nine weeks of the campaign. That was followed by WPVI (the ABC affiliate) with exactly one-quarter of the ads. The other two network affiliated stations, KYW (NBC) and WTXF (Fox) each accounted for just over one-fifth of the ads (22% and 21%, respectively). On the other hand, WPSG (the duopoly station with KYW), presented only 11 percent of the ads (Table 2). The vast majority of political ads appeared on the four network affiliated stations (96%, 7,651 out of 8,003).

Table 2: Stations & Political Ads

Station	% ads (n)
WCAU	27 (2,144)
WPVI	25 (2,031)
KYW	22 (1,776)
WTXF	21 (1,700)
WPHL	4 (307)
WPSG	>1 (45)
<i>Total</i>	<i>100 (8,003)</i>

Political Ads: Proportion on newscasts

Importantly, the newscasts of the stations were, by far, the preferred program choice for the sponsors to present their political ads---two-thirds of the total ads appeared there (Table 3). However, that percentage varied widely among the stations. Almost all of the political ads that aired on the Fox station, WTXF, (98%) ran during the newscasts. That was followed by the revenue leader, WPVI, with 90 percent of ads on newscasts. Behind those two stations, there was a significant drop-off in newscast political ads by the other two network affiliates. However, political ad sponsors placed their ads on the news programs at least half of the time (WCAU at 64% and KYW at 51%). The news sharing and duopoly stations used their newscasts for political ads less frequently (Table 3). Political advertisers used newscasts less frequently on the news sharing and duopoly stations. On WPSG, the duopoly station with KYW, they used newscasts for only 11 percent of their ads. That proportion was 44 percent on WPHL (the news sharing station with WPVI). Of course, the stations varied in terms of the amount of news each broadcast on a typical day.

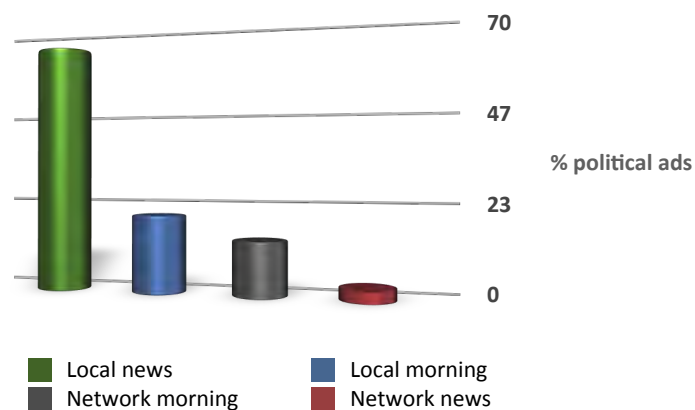
Table 3: Stations, Political Ads & Newscasts

Station	% ads on newscasts
WXTF	98
WPVI	90
WCAU	64
KYW	51
WPHL	44
WPSG	11
<i>Average for all stations</i>	<i>67</i>

Political Ads: Program Type

The political ads were presented on four types of news programs, which were defined by the entity that had control over content---the local station or the affiliated network. The local station had control of the content of two types; (1) local television newscasts and (2) local morning talk shows, such as the *Good Day* program that appears on the local Fox affiliate, WTXF. The third and fourth types were the network versions of these programs, (3) network newscasts (which included the Sunday political talk shows such as *Meet the Press*) and (4) network morning shows such as NBC's *Today* program.

Fig 2: Distribution of political ads by program type

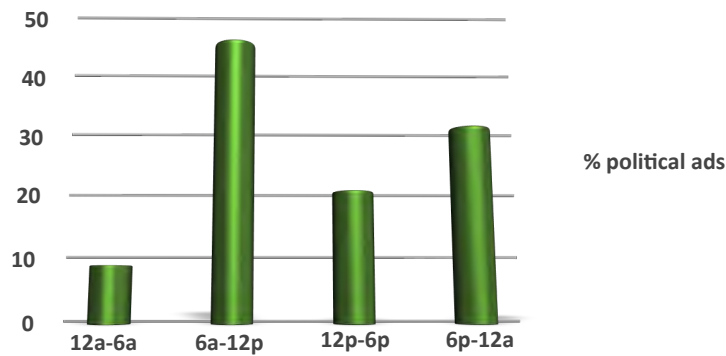


The overwhelming majority of political ads (almost two-thirds) appeared on local television newscasts (Fig. 2). That was followed by local morning programs (20%). Network morning shows and network news accounted for small proportions of ads (14% and 3%, respectively). This may reflect the fact that network ads were much more expensive than local programs.

Political Ads: When during the day?

Political advertisers want to reach a particular audience and, overwhelmingly, they chose the audiences of newscasts. But, there is another refinement in that calculus---the time of day of the newscasts. We divided the 24-hour broadcast day into four equal time periods: period 1 ran from midnight to 6am; period 2 ran from 6am to noon; period 3 from noon to 6pm and period 4 from 6pm to midnight.

Fig. 3: Distribution of political ads by time period

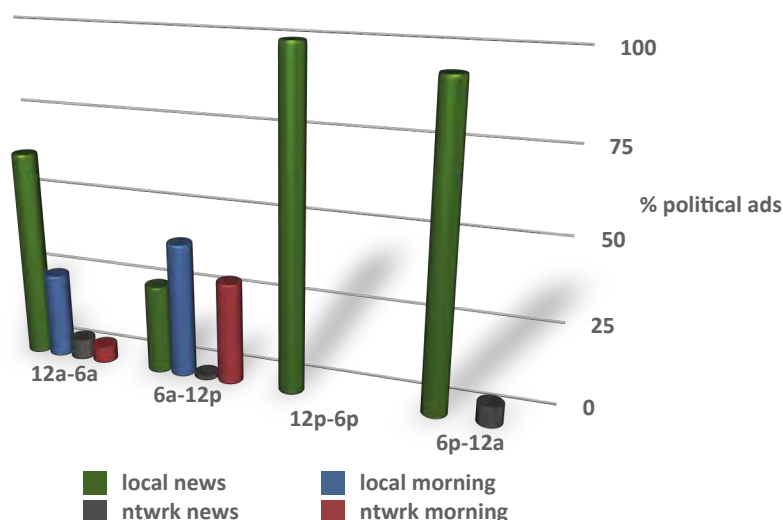


Consistent with the finding that most political ads appeared on local newscasts, (see Fig. 2), they also were presented during the times of day when the stations broadcast the most news programs. Over 40 percent of the political ads were broadcast during the period from 6 am to noon. That was followed a by another 30 percent presented between 6 pm and midnight (Fig. 3).

Political Ads: When during the day by program type?

The vast majority of political ads were presented on local newscasts and they were presented across the broadcast day (see Figures 2 & 3). Another consideration is how the political ads were distributed among the program types in those four time periods during the day. In three of the four time periods, local newscasts dominated the presentation of political ads (Fig. 4). In the midnight to 6am block, local news accounted for almost two-thirds of the ads. Between noon and 6pm local newscasts comprised 100 percent of the presentation of political ads, followed by 94 percent between 6pm and midnight. During the 6am to 12pm time period local newscasts accounted for just over one-fourth of political ads, but the local and network morning shows presented more of the ads (41% and 31%, respectively).

Fig 4: Distribution of ads by time period & program type



Political Ads: Content

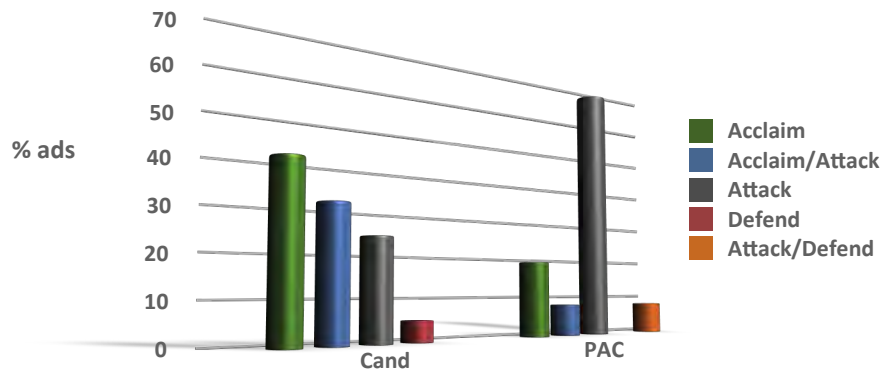
Political advertising in the fall of 2014 was not only ubiquitous but repetitive. The 8,003 political ads that were presented in the Philly market between September 1st and November 3rd represented only 71 unique ads. That is understandable because the cost of production is quite high. Therefore, the ad sponsors incurred that cost only once and spent most of their resources on the repeated dissemination of the ads. Almost two thirds of the ads (63%) were sponsored by the candidates themselves and the remaining portion (37%) were sponsored by PACs.

There are many valid ways to examine ad content (topic, frame, etc.). In this examination, we adopted the functional analysis advanced by William Benoit (2014). The three separate “functions” that the political ads perform are:

acclaim (self-praise or positive remarks); attack (negative remarks) and defense (refutations of attacks). In our analysis, the ads also revealed two combinations of those functions: acclaim & attack and acclaim & defend. Therefore, we identified five functional categories of political ads.

The ad sponsor made a difference (statistically significant, $p < .05$) in the function of the ads. The most dramatic aspect of sponsorship revealed that two-thirds of PAC ads functioned as attacks as compared to just over one-fifth (21%) of candidate sponsored ads (Fig. 5). Candidate ads were completely positive acclamations two-fifths of the time (40%). Most of the attacks (31%) occurred in the combination of the acclaim/attack function. Typically, these ads began with the attack---disparaging the character or the policies of an

Fig. 5: Political ad function & sponsor



opponent---followed by an acclamation regarding how the candidate would do things differently. The lesson was clear--candidates relied upon other parties to carry out the assaults on their opponents.

Political Ads: Cost

Over the course of the campaign from September 1 to November 3rd, the day before the election, there were 11,937 political ads broadcast across the entire range of programs on the stations. The 8,003 ads whose content we examined for this research were those that were broadcast on news programs during that period. However, we report the revenue for the total number of ads that were bought by the sponsors during the campaign period.

As the presentation of the political ads was not evenly distributed among the six stations in the sample, Sunlight Foundation found that the money that was paid to the stations also heavily favored the four network affiliates. The individual stations realized significant revenue in exchange for broadcasting political ads. WPVI, the ABC affiliate and perennial ratings leader, brought in over \$4.5 million at an average ad price of almost \$2,000. It was, by far, the most expensive “ad buy” in the market. KYW, the CBS affiliate, realized the second highest ad revenue at almost \$3.8 million. However, the average price of an ad was about half of WPVI’s price, \$1,096. WCAU, the NBC affiliate, came in third in the political ad revenue sweepstakes with revenues of just over \$3.4 million with an average price of \$1,021. WTXF (the Fox affiliate) realized total political ad revenues significantly below the other affiliates---just below \$1.8 million. The news-sharing station, WPHL, and the duopoly station, WPSG, realized significantly less revenue from political ads than their network affiliate neighbors, just over \$729,000 and \$185,000, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4: Stations & Political Ads

Station	Total pol ad revenue	# ads	Avg price/ad
WPVI	\$4,526,835	2,268	\$1,996
KYW	\$3,788,675	3,458	\$1,096
WCAU	\$3,431,571	3,360	\$1,021
WTXF	\$1,768,750	1,740	\$1,016
WPHL	\$729,261	690	\$1,057
WPSG	\$185,030	421	\$440
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$14,430,122</i>	<i>11,937</i>	<i>\$1,209</i>

Political Ads: Sponsors & Number of Ads

As in every campaign, the frequency of political ads was determined by the amount of money to which sponsors had access as well as the relative competitiveness of the campaigns. The 2014 midterm election followed that pattern. There were very large differences in the number of political ads that each sponsor bought in the Philly market during the campaign (Table 5).

Table 5: Sponsor & Number of Political ads

Sponsor	#Ads
Tom Wolf for Governor	1191
Kane for Senate	1066
Tom MacArthur for Congress	966
Tom Corbett For Governor	870
Chris Coons for Delaware	458
Donald Norcross for Congress	549
Tom McGarrigle for State Senate	424
Aimee Belgard For Congress	331
Frank LoBiondo for Congress	313
Fitzpatrick for Congress	213
American Action Network	185
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers	185
Ryan Costello for Congress	183
Trivedi for Congress	181
Mark Aurand for Senate	162
Crossroads GPS	156
Election Fund of Garagnio and O'Brien	99
PA House Democratic Campaign Committee	98
Simmons, Barnes & Taliaferro for Freeholder	85
Aimee Belgard for Congress & Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee	77
Friends of Warren Kampf	50
Tomlinson for State Senate	48

Table 5: Sponsor & Number of Political ads

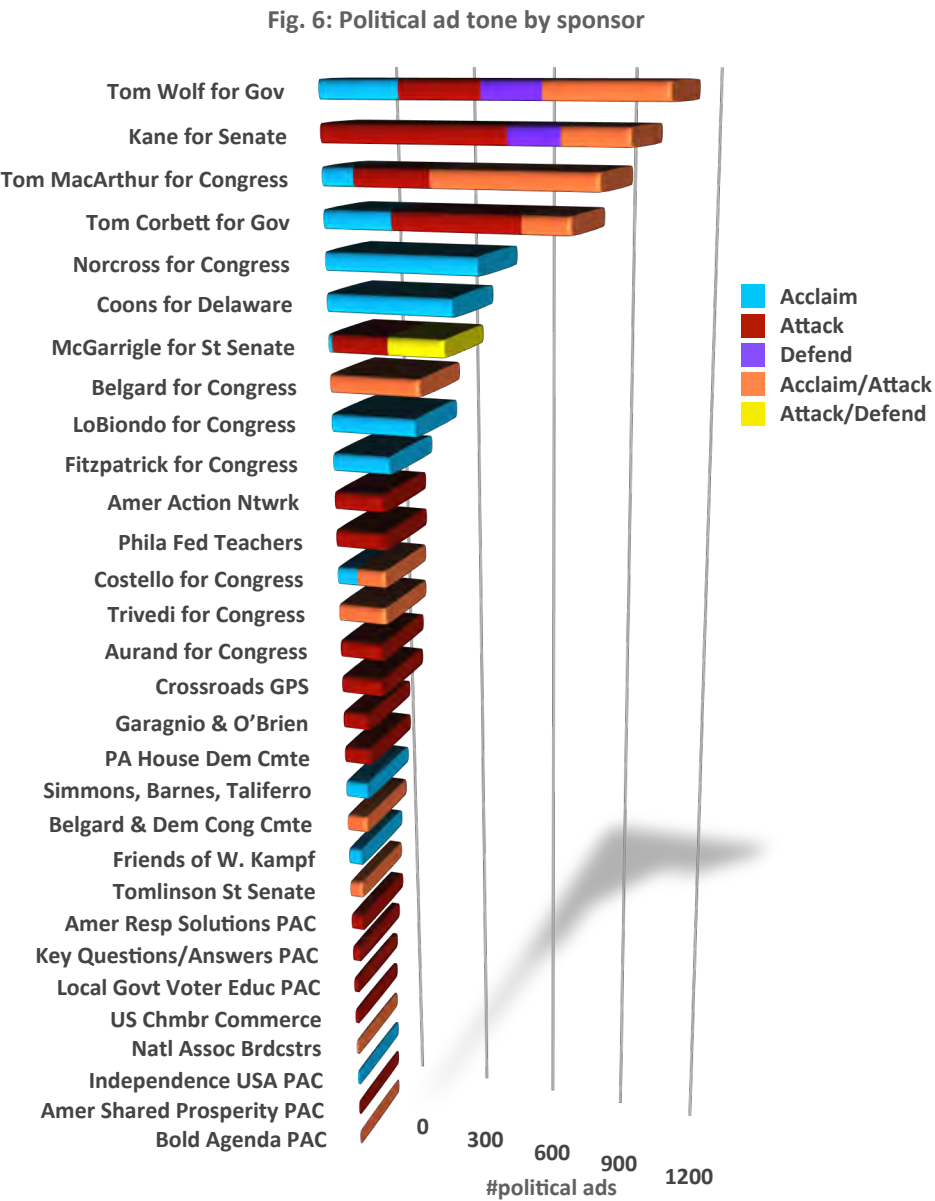
Sponsor	#Ads
Americans for Responsible Solutions PAC	46
Key Questions, Key Answers	27
Local Government Voter Education PAC	14
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	9
National Association of Broadcasters	7
Independence USA PAC	6
Americans for Shared Prosperity	3
Bold agenda PAC	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>8,003</i>

Political ads: Sponsors & Tone

There was wide variation among the political ad sponsors in the tone of their ads (N=8,003). As stated previously, we identified the ad content by its function using Benoit's categories as a starting point. The coding revealed five types of ad function: acclaim, attack, defend; acclaim/attack and attack/defend. Figure 6 presents the distribution of the tone of the ads for each of the sponsors that was identified in the campaign. The chart is organized to indicate the magnitude of the number of ads that each sponsor purchased. The Tom Wolf for Governor committee sponsored the most ads (1,191) while Bold Agenda PAC purchased only one ad. Further, the chart shows the distribution of the functions of the ads for each sponsor. For example, the ads for the Wolf campaign had a relatively equal distribution across the acclaim, attack and defend functions. However, over a third of its ads (420) used the acclaim and attack approach. Likewise, the Kane for Senate campaign relied heavily on attack ads (over 60%). The Tom MacArthur for Congress campaign committee bought over 1000 campaign spots and over 90 percent of them attacked (either directly or after an acclamation) his opponent, Aimee Belgard. Belgard and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee combined for about 400 ads, all of which functioned as acclaim & attack efforts against MacArthur. Belgard lost by ten percentage points.

It is important to note that several sponsors presented only acclaim (positive) ads. They were Norcross for Congress, Coons for Senate, LoBiondo for Congress, Fitzpatrick for Congress, Simmons, Barnes, Taliaferro for Freeholder, Friends of Warren Kampf and Independence USA PAC.

A larger number of sponsors, however, presented only attack ads. Among them were American Action Network, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, Aurand for Congress and Crossroads GPS.



Methodology

Broadcasts

The methodology for this research was content analysis (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). It is a method that produces a systematic and objective description of information content. The analytical method used in this research was the Chi-square measure of association. Content analysis has been used extensively over time to examine local television news (Alexander & Brown, 2004; Atwater, 1986; Chermak, 1995; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Graber, 1980; Miller, 1998, Yanich, 2001).

Research questions

The research questions are separated by their focus on two units of observation---political ads and news stories.

- 1.What was the distribution of political ads on the six television stations in the Philadelphia television market during the 2014 general election campaign?
2. What were the characteristics of the political ads such as sponsor, issue emphasis, topic, theme and presentation style during the 2014 general election in the Philadelphia television market?
3. Were there political news stories referring to the campaign presented on the local newscasts during the 2014 general election in the Philadelphia television market? If so, what did they cover?
4. Were the issues presented in the political ads covered as stories by the local newscasts during the 2014 general election in the Philadelphia television market? If so, which issues were covered? How were they presented?

Sample of stations

The stations whose broadcasts were included in this research comprised all of the stations in the Philadelphia television market that regularly delivered a daily newscast to the viewers. They were: KYW, WPVI, WCAU, WTXF, WPHL MyTv and WPSG CW.

Sample of broadcasts

The sample of broadcasts for this research covered the period from Monday, September 8 through Monday, November 3, 2012 (the day before the

election). This period coincided with the conventional characterization of the main campaign season. That period was eight weeks². We separated the weekday and week-end broadcasts. Further, we identified the highest rated broadcasts for each of the four affiliate stations and separated them from the other weekday broadcasts. That period was the 6pm newscasts for the ABC, CBS and NBC affiliates and the 10pm newscast of the Fox affiliate.

Each week (on weekdays, Monday through Friday) the six stations broadcast a combined total of 120 newscasts, 20 of which were broadcast by the four affiliates during the highest rated period and 100 of which were broadcast at other times during the day after 6am. We did not include newscasts before the 6am hour because there were relatively fewer political ads that were presented during those times. For each week, a total sample of 36 broadcasts was drawn out of the 120 broadcasts. The weekday sample was drawn to accommodate the importance of the highest rated broadcasts. Therefore, we randomly drew 12 of the 20 highest rated broadcasts each week for a total sample of the highest rated programs of 96 broadcasts (8 weeks X 20 broadcasts/week).

For the other weekday broadcasts, we drew a random sample each week of 24 broadcasts from the 100 broadcasts that were presented by the stations. Therefore, the total sample of broadcasts that appeared at times other than the highest rated period of the day was 192 (8 weeks X 24 broadcasts/week). The total weekday sample of newscasts was 288 (192 + 96). Each week, the sample accounted for 30 percent sample of the universe of broadcasts (36/120).

In addition to the weekday sample, we included broadcasts from the weekends during the election season. Each weekend the stations presented a total of 34 newscasts. Consistent with our approach for weekday broadcasts, we drew a random sample of 10 newscasts from the 34 broadcasts each week (approximately a 30% sample). That yielded a weekend sample of 80 broadcasts (10 broadcasts X 8 weeks).

Given that Election Day was Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2014. We included in the sample every newscast that was presented on Monday, Nov. 3 after 6am. That yielded another 24 broadcasts to the total sample.

² It is important to note that the analysis of the political ads covered the period from Sept 1 to Nov 3, 2014. The *content analysis* of the broadcasts covered the period from Sept 8 to Nov 3 because broadcast content was not available for the first week of September.

The total number of broadcasts that were presented by the stations after 6am during the election period identified for this research (Sept 8-Nov.3, 2014) was 1,256. The broadcasts were either 30 or 60 minutes in duration and they accounted for 974 hours of local newscasts during the election period. In total, the 390 randomly drawn newscasts in the sample represented 31 percent of the universe of broadcasts. The distribution of these broadcasts across the stations varied greatly due to the frequency and number of newscasts each presented throughout a typical week. WPVI, often the ratings leader in the market, accounted for 114 broadcasts. That was followed by WCAU and KYW with 84 and 81 broadcasts, respectively. WTXF presented 58 broadcasts, followed by WPSG and WPHL (39 and 14 broadcasts, respectively).

The sample of broadcasts for this research was drawn from a universe of newscasts that were presented after 6am. However, if we include the programs that were broadcast before 6am, the total number of local newscasts during the election period was 1,731, comprising 1,215 hours of broadcast time.

Units of observation

There were three separate units of observation in the research and, as a result, the coding of the content was done in a necessary sequence. The first unit of observation was the individual broadcast units that comprised the broadcasts. This process was used to initially identify the elements of the broadcasts and to specify the political ads and political stories that were the subjects of later coding. The second unit of observation was the individual political ads and the third unit of observation was the individual political stories that were presented on the newscasts on which the political ads appeared.

The coding revealed that there were 18,236 broadcast units that comprised the newscasts consisting of: stories (8,706), commercials (3,380), sports/weather/traffic segments (2,204), promos for the station or network (2,199) and political ads (1,747). The category of stories was comprised of: crime (2,505); health (805); business/economy/jobs (513); environment (26); education (191); public issues other than crime, health, business, environment & education (1,105); human interest (2,064); fire/accidents/disasters (880); international stories, including Afghanistan/Iraq/Iran/Syria (427); political stories (190).

For purposes of this analysis, the stories were aggregated into the following categories: crime (2,505); public issues other than crime (2,640); human interest (2,064); Fires/accidents/disasters (880); international (427) and political stories (190)

The distribution of these units across the five stations was: WPVI=4,819 (26%); WCAU=4,009 (22%); KYW=3,835 (21%); WTXF=2,988 (16%); WPSG=1,751 (10%); WPHL=834 (5%). For a complete listing of the distribution of broadcast units by station, see Appendix 1; for the proportion of broadcast time by station, see Appendix 2.

The overall content of the broadcasts in the sample was coded by six students (2 undergraduate and 4 graduate, 2 of whom are pursuing the media & public policy concentration). The students were trained to use the coding protocol over the course of six weeks. During the training, two tests of inter-coder reliability were implemented which provided guidance on where continued training was required. A final test of inter-coder reliability was applied at the end of the training period. All of the broadcasts on one randomly chosen day provided the data for the test for inter-coder reliability for the variables of type, in/out DMA and mode. Each story and political ad in all of the broadcasts was coded by all of the coders. We assessed the agreement among the coders across the variables that were essential to the research question—type of story, presentation mode, whether it was a local story, political ad sponsor, etc. We did not assess agreement on simple identification variables such as the date of the broadcast, the station’s network affiliation, etc. The results of the tests for inter-coder reliability (Table 6) revealed that agreement among the major content variables for stories had a range from 87 percent (story type) to 91 percent (presentation mode). For political ads, the agreement range was 97 percent (theme) to 100 percent (political ad sponsor & candidate name). As expected, given the assumptions inherent in these indices, the Cohen’s kappa scores for the same variables were generally lower than the agreement scores, ranging between 0.81 and 1.0, averaging 0.83 for stories and .93 for political ads (Table 6).

Table 6: Reliability Results for Key Variables

	<i>Stories</i>				<i>Political Ads</i>						
	<i>Type</i>	<i>In/Out DMA*</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Avg. Stories</i>	<i>PolAd Spnsr</i>	<i>Cand Name</i>	<i>Spker</i>	<i>PolAd Support</i>	<i>PolAd Oppose</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Avg. Pol ads</i>
Kappa for multiple coders	0.85	0.81	0.83	0.83	1	1	0.91	0.85	0.94	0.87	0.93
% agree	0.87	0.9	0.91	0.89	1	1	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.99

*DMA is a registered service mark of The Nielsen Company. Used under license.

As seen in Table 6, kappa scores for each of the variables met the generally accepted criteria of, at least, “fair to good agreement beyond chance” (.40-.75) and several of the kappa statistics above .75 reveal “excellent agreement” (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney & Sinha, 1999, p. 6).

The second unit of observation was the individual political ads that appeared on the broadcasts. As I stated previously, there were 8,003 political ads that were presented on newscasts between September 1 and November 3, 2014. The sample of broadcasts that formed the basis for this content analysis presented 1,747 of those political ads.

The third unit of observation was the individual political stories (n=190) that were part of the broadcasts. These stories underwent a second coding regime to determine which, if any, of the public issues raised in the political ads was covered by the stations in these political stories. The stories were coded by one researcher, the project director, therefore no test for inter-coder reliability was appropriate.

Local TV Findings

The findings of the content analysis of the local television broadcasts appear in the following section.

Length of broadcasts

Newscasts in the Philadelphia market consisted of both 30 and 60 minute durations. So, too, did our sample. Of the 390 broadcasts in the sample, 188 (48%) had a duration of 30 minutes and 202 (52%) were 60 minutes. It is important to note that, on average, the stations did not increase the length of their broadcasts to make space for additional political ads. However, as we shall see, the standard length of broadcasts provided ample opportunity for the presentation of ads.

There were significant differences in the number of broadcasts across the stations in the sample, resulting in varying amounts of total broadcast time that each station comprised. The total broadcast time within the sample was 300 hours of newscasts. The difference across the station was statistically significant. WPVI (ABC affiliate) was the clear leader, accounting for 81 hours of newscast time. That was followed by KYW (CBS) and WCAU (NBC) at 63 and 62 hours, respectively. WTXF (Fox) broadcast 50 hours; WPSG (CW) followed with 31 hours. WPHL (MyTV) broadcast, by far, the least amount of news at 13 hours.

Time of broadcasts

The news programs were presented throughout the broadcast day: 112 (29%) were aired between 6am and noon; 80 (20%) were presented between noon and 6 pm; and 198 (51%) were broadcast between 6 pm and midnight. That is consistent with the decision to include the highest rated newscasts during each week. That was typically the 6 pm or the 10 pm program.

Composition of a standard broadcast

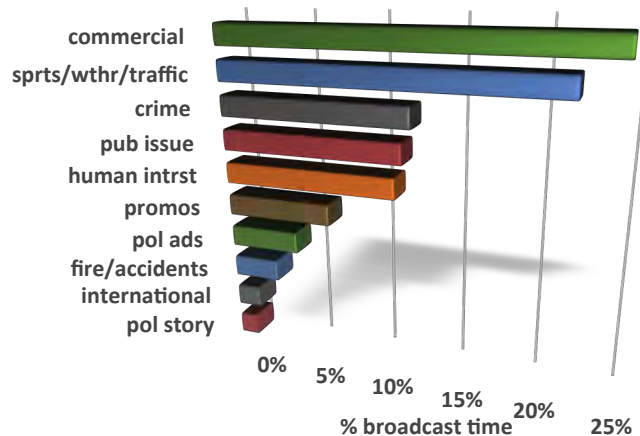
We examined all of the parts that comprise a broadcast and we use the term *broadcast category* to identify them. In order to understand the composition of the broadcasts, we had to address all of them. The broadcasts were comprised of stories, sports/weather/traffic segments, commercials, promos and political ads.

The initial coding of story type included 11 separate categories of stories. They were: crime, health, business/economy, environment, education, public issues (all public issues other than crime, health, economy, environment & education), human interest, fires/accidents, Afghanistan/Iraq/Iran/Syria, international stories (other than Afghan/Iraq/Iran/Syria) and political campaign stories. For purposes of this analysis, the 11 story types were aggregated into six logical categories. They were: (1) crime; (2) public issues (all public issues other than crime); (3) human interest; (4) fires/accidents; (5) international stories and (6) political stories (those stories that referred to the campaign).

The remaining broadcast categories, sports/weather/traffic segments, commercials, promos and political ads were treated as separate entities. Therefore, the broadcast consisted of ten types of broadcast categories.

Television news programs deal with a finite resource---time. Therefore, the amount of time that a newscast devotes to a particular broadcast category represents its importance in the newscast. To account for this condition, the composition of the typical news program is reported here as the proportion of newscast time that was devoted to each broadcast category. There was no statistically significant difference in newscast composition between 30 and 60-minute broadcasts. Therefore, this construction of the newscast represents all of the programs in the sample.

Fig. 7: Composition of newscasts by broadcast time



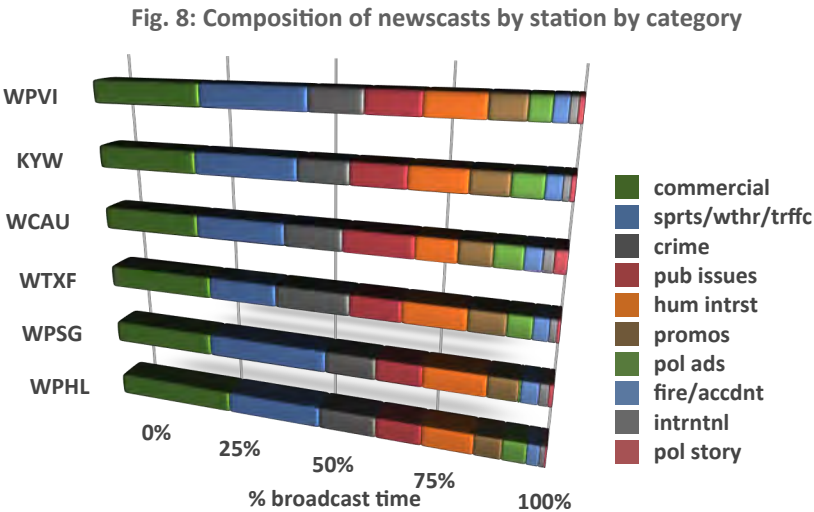
Almost one-quarter of broadcast time was devoted to commercials and another one-fifth was comprised of sports, weather and traffic segments (Fig. 7). The most prominent stories dealing with a public issue were crime (13%).

That was followed by public issue stories (12%) which combined every other public issue topic (health, education, economy, environment, etc.). But, the most striking feature regarding newscast composition given our examination of political ads and political stories was that political ads occupied more time (about 5%) than political stories (about 1%). In fact, political stories came in dead last among the things that comprised a newscast.

Composition of standard broadcasts across the stations

Given that the stations accounted for vastly different amounts of broadcast time, it is useful to examine the average broadcast across each of them. There was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of broadcast time that each used for the broadcast categories.

There were statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) in the amount of total broadcast time each station comprised (300 hours over all 390 broadcasts). The proportions, in order, were as follows: WPVI, 27%; KYW, 21%; WCAU, 20%; WTXF, 17%; WPSG, 10% and WPHL, 5%. The information in Figure 8 is organized to reflect the differences. The chart presents how each station used its total broadcast time across the categories, whatever amount of its broadcast time. So, the composition of WPVI’s newscast is shown first, followed by the others as they represented decreasing proportions of total



broadcast time for our sample of programs. Commercials dominated the broadcast time of all of the stations, especially WPHL (accounting for almost one-quarter). However, sports, weather and traffic segments occupied the second most amount of time followed by crime. The proportions of these types of broadcast categories varied across the stations, but they were the

most prominent. For our purposes, the proportion of time devoted to political stories, although comprising the least amount of time, varied significantly for the stations. WCAU was, by far, the most active station in presenting political stories. But, in a typical broadcast, the station only used about 2.5 percent of broadcast time for such stories. WPVI and KYW used about one percent of their broadcasts for political stories. The other stations were all substantially below that mark.

Stories and political ads on the broadcasts

In very real terms, commercials, sports/weather/traffic segments and promos are structural features of local newscasts---they are always included. They are not subjected to the daily news selection calculus in which news directors

Political stories, for all stations, was the least covered story type.

engage in a zero-sum game--some stories are in and that puts other stories out. In fact, the professional literature treats them as separate entities from

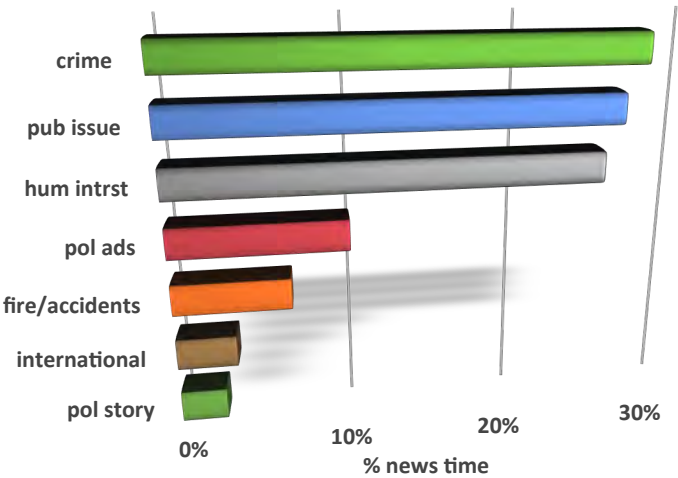
stories (Jones, 2004 and Donald & Spann, 2000). To accommodate that reality, we looked at the distribution of broadcast time among the stories and political ads as a separate part of the newscast because these broadcast categories *are* subject to the zero-sum game of the news selection process. That is, we removed the structural broadcast categories and calculated the amount of the remaining time that was devoted to stories and political ads. For the purposes of our examination, we included political ads in that calculus because they are a different entity than the regular commercials that the stations present. We use the term “total news time” to distinguish this portion of the broadcast from the entire broadcast time (see, Yanich, 2011). Using this metric, the stations combined total of news time was 126 hours for the sample period.

This view of the composition of the broadcasts revealed very important realities of the news selection process. In the part of the newscast in which news directors *had* discretion regarding story type, crime was the overwhelming choice, accounting for almost thirty percent of news time (Fig. 9), virtually doubling its proportion when looking at all broadcast categories (see Fig. 7). But most important for our analysis was the difference in the time devoted to political ads and political stories. Political ads occupied four times as much news time as political stories (10% versus 2.5%, respectively). And, remember, political ads were overwhelmingly only 30-second spots.

The average length of all stories was 52 seconds, but that varied significantly across story type. Crime, public issues and human interest stories were all close to the average (54, 58 and 51 seconds, respectively). Stories about accidents/fires and international topics were substantially lower (averages of

37 and 39 seconds, respectively). The important point for our analysis is that political stories were, on average, the longest of the story types (68 seconds). However, within each story type, there was wide variation.

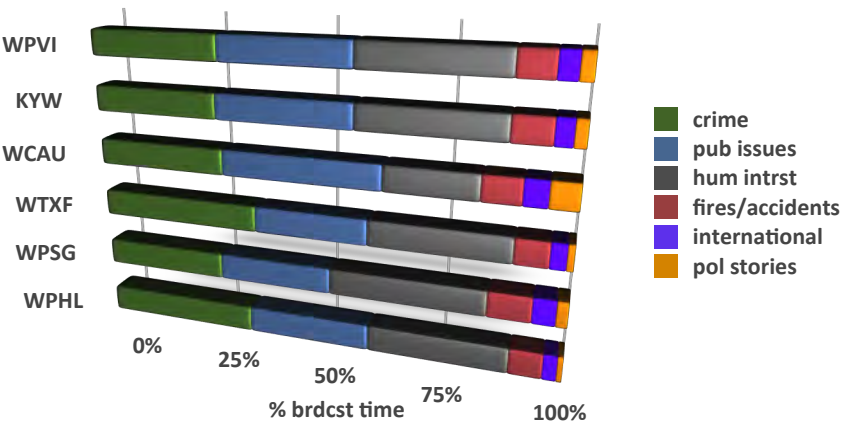
Fig 9: Distribution of broadcast time by for stories & political ads



Stories and political ads on the stations

As we did for the complete broadcast, let us look at how the individual stations presented the stories and the political ads. There was a statistically significant difference across the stations in how they organized their typical broadcast. Crime was the prominent issue that was covered across all six stations, but that varied between 35 percent of news time for WTXF to 27 percent of time for

Fig. 10: Stories & Political Ads across stations



WPSG (Fig. 10). WCAU lead the way significantly in covering public issues stories with over one-third of news time devoted to such coverage. At the other end of the spectrum, WTXF, the leader in crime coverage, was last in the presentation of public issue stories (24% of news time).

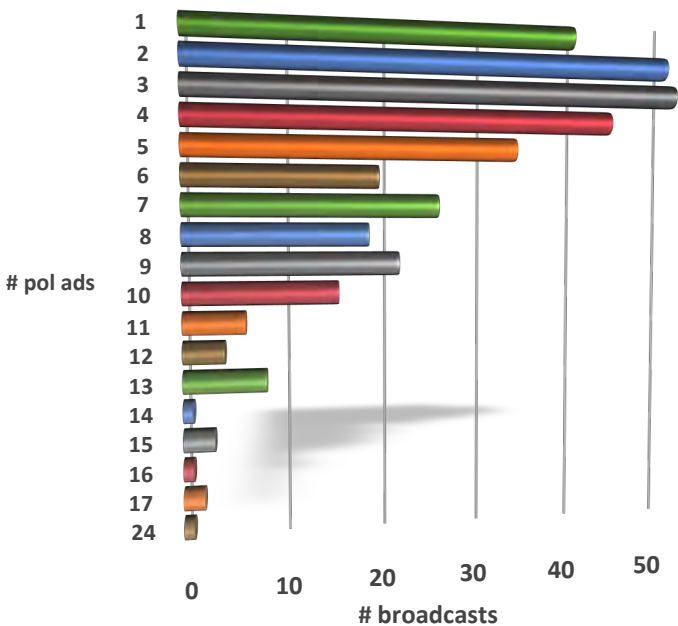
WCAU was also the leader in political stories, using about six percent of news time for that purpose. That was, at least, double the proportions for the other stations. Still, political stories, for all stations, was the least covered story type.

Political ads on the broadcasts

The overwhelming majority (88%) of the 1,747 political ads that appeared on the sample broadcasts were sponsored by the candidates. The other 12 percent were sponsored by PACs.

Given the proportion of time that was devoted to political ads on the broadcasts, how did that translate into the *number* of ads that were presented? Of the 390 broadcasts in the sample, 52 did not broadcast any political ads. These broadcasts were distributed across all of the stations in the sample and occurred, most frequently, in the early weeks of the campaign period. As a result, 338 broadcasts contained political ads. How were the ads distributed across those broadcasts?

Fig. 11: Distribution of political ads across broadcasts



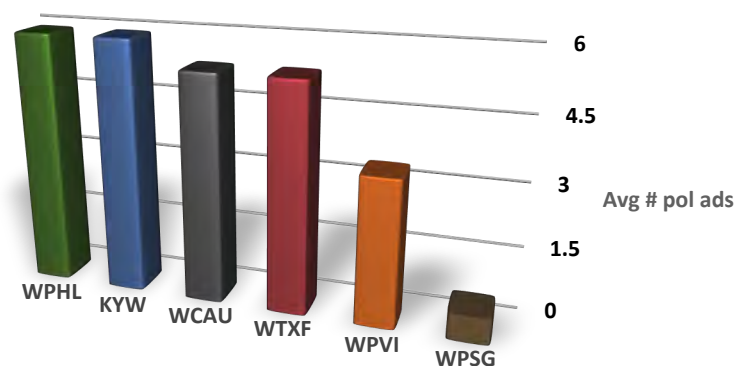
There was not a statistically significant difference in the number of political ads based on the 30 or 60-minute duration of the newscasts. Therefore, these findings represent all of the broadcasts. The first feature that we see with the distribution of political ads is the range--some broadcasts (39 of them) only presented one political ad, but another one (it was only one 60-minute newscast) presented 24 political ads (Fig. 11). The tipping point seemed to be about ten political ads (15 newscasts contained that number of ads). The average number of ads for the broadcasts was 5.2, but the standard deviation was 3.6 which indicated a relatively wide variation in the number of ads across the broadcasts.

Although the number of political ads per broadcast is an important finding. We must remember how they were presented in the newscasts---in bunches, to use a vernacular term. The political ads were shown during the commercial breaks in a sequence. So, the ad for one candidate was followed by the ad of another candidate, frequently the opponent, and that was followed by another ad. Therefore, citizens were bombarded with often irreconcilable versions of the same reality. Consequently, the need for political journalism was clear.

Political ads on the stations

There was a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) in the average number of political ads on a newscast by station. Both WPHL and KYW averaged about six political ads per newscast (Fig. 12). WCAU and WTXF followed with just over five ads per broadcast. Interestingly, WPVI, the station that accounted for the most broadcasts in the sample (114), presented fewer than four political

Fig. 12: Average number of political ads on a newscast by station



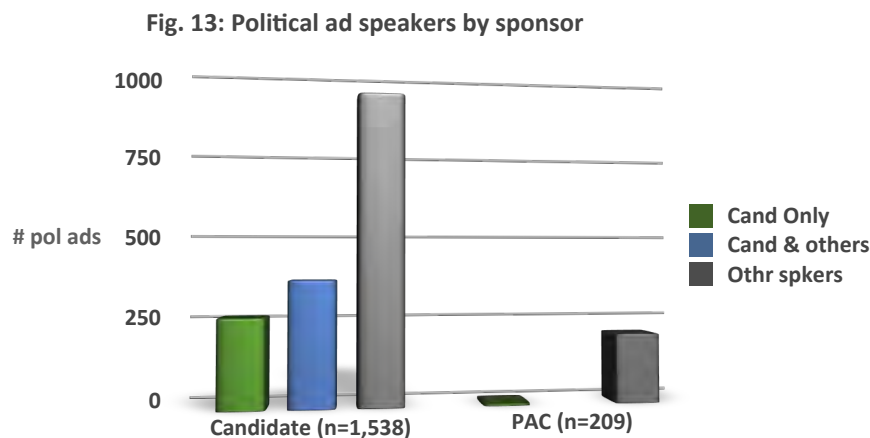
ads per newscast. WPSG presented the fewest number of political ads, on average (about 1). Therefore, depending on where the audience got its news, they were treated to different approaches to political ads. Of course, the

number of political ads on any station is subject to many decisions on the part of the sponsor. This is to say that there were differences in that treatment across the stations in Philadelphia.

Political ad speakers on the broadcasts

As we learned, the sponsor of the political ads affected the tone of the ads (see, Figure 5). We examined who the speakers were on the ads (N=1,747) within the broadcasts of the sample. There were three categories: the candidate only; the candidate *and* other speakers; speakers *other than* the candidate. As we might expect, the sponsor also affected the speaker.

The overwhelming majority of political ads (88%) on the newscasts were sponsored by the candidates' campaign committees. However, even with that sponsorship, the candidates used other speakers (on 911 ads) to extoll their virtues or indicate the shortcomings of their opponents (Fig. 13). These ads often took on the acclaim/attack function that we mentioned previously. That reliance on speakers other than the candidate also characterized political ads that were sponsored by PACs (204 out of the 209 ads in that category).

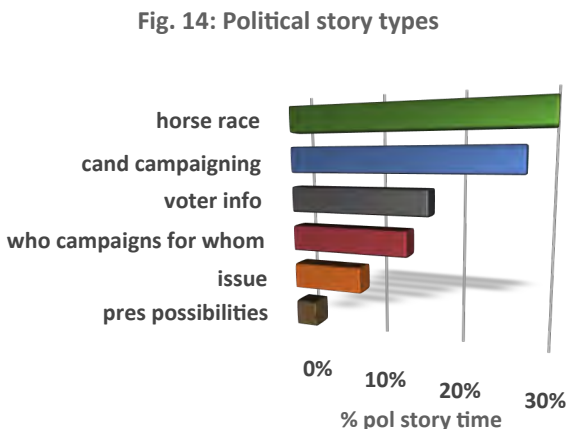


Political stories on the broadcasts

In contrast to the number of political ads that were presented on the newscasts (1,747), there were only 190 stories that focused on the campaign---a ratio of nine ads to one story. However, it is also important to understand the amount of broadcast time that each---political ads and political stories---occupied. Political ads accounted for 842 minutes on the broadcasts as compared to 216 minutes for political stories---a four to one ratio. For this analysis, the 216 minutes comprise “total political story time”. Political stories were, on average, about 68 seconds long as compared to the standard ad spot of 30 seconds.

But, whatever the metric, political ads outnumbered political stories by significant margins.

The political stories were subjected to a second coding scheme to determine the focus of each. The analysis revealed six types of story. The first type of political story focused on the “horse race”---who was up and who was down in the polls and strategies that the campaigns might employ to change their positions in the field. The second type of story, “candidates campaigning”, simply stated facts about where and when candidates had or were going to hold campaign events. The third type focused on “voter information”. The majority of these stories presented the debates and the proposed coverage of election returns. The fourth type of story focused on “who was campaigning for whom”. For example, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie campaigned for Pennsylvania incumbent governor Tom Corbett, President and Michelle Obama, Hillary and Bill Clinton did so for his opponent, Tom Wolf. Perhaps, the most surprising story of this type was a report that boxer Mike Tyson was supporting Toronto Mayor Rob Ford’s re-election bid. Ford subsequently



withdrew from the race for medical reasons, but the relevance of the story to elections in Philadelphia was questionable. The fifth type of political story focused on an “issue” in the campaign. Type six examined “presidential possibilities” in which speculation about the potential presidential candidacies of Chris Christie and Hillary Clinton was the topic.

How were the 216 minutes of the time devoted to political stories distributed across the types of political story? The treatment of the campaign as a horse race---there were 55 stories---accounted for more of the time allotted to political stories (30%) than any other topic (Fig. 14). That was closely followed

by stories about the candidates (n=39) campaigning (27%). Much of the information in those stories could be derived from the press releases of the campaign. Voter information (n=39) occupied less than one-fifth of political story time (17%). Stories about who campaigned for whom (n=41) comprised about 14 percent of time. Remarkably, stories about issues in the campaign (n=10) occupied only 9 percent of political story time. Last among the stories were those that referred to the presidential possibilities of persons who were *not* in any of the contested races of the mid-term election (just under 3% and n=6).

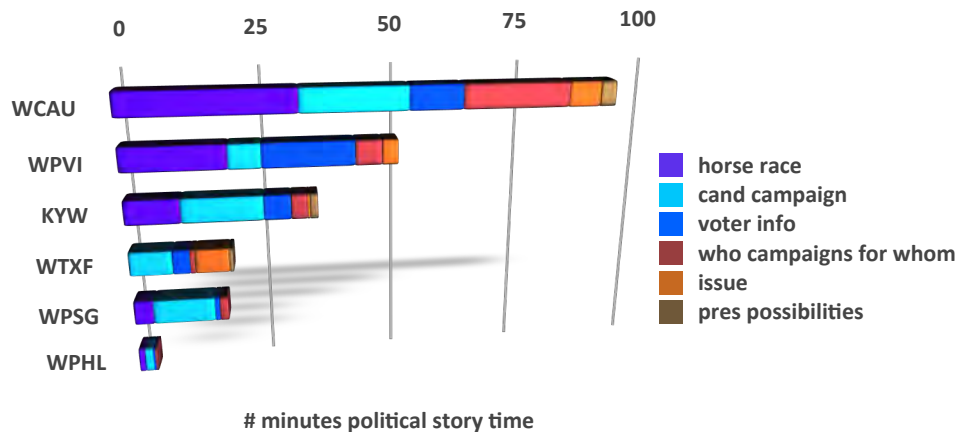
Political stories on the stations

All of the stations included political stories in their newscasts. The question, then, is how they were distributed across the stations. We extend the analysis of political story time to each of the stations. What proportion of the total time used for political stories was devoted to each type of political story on each station? But before we get to that point, we must specify the amount of political story time each station offered. There was very wide and statistically significant variation across the stations regarding that metric. WCAU was, by far, the leader in the category, accounting for 91 of 216 minutes (42%) of total political story time. The other stations were as follows: WPVI=50 minutes (23%) ; KYW=35 minutes (16%); WTXF=19 minutes (9%); WPSG=17 minutes (8%); WPHL=3 minutes (2%). As a result, the order of the stations in Figure 15 is based on the amount of total political story time that each presented. The information is presented as the number of minutes each station allotted to the various types of political story.

It is important to note that only two stations, WCAU and KYW, presented all of the types of political stories. However, WCAU spent much more time on the horse race theme (32 minutes) than any of the other types. It spent seven minutes on the issues in the campaign. WPVI broadcast just over 50 minutes of political stories. Again, the horse race story was the most prevalent type (37 minutes), followed by voter information (34 minutes). WPVI allotted six minutes to campaign issues. KYW spent most of its political story time on the candidate campaign type of story (15 minutes), spending 30 seconds on the issues in the campaign. WTXF was the only station that did not present a horse race story about the campaign. Instead, it broadcast stories about the candidates campaigning (just under 8 minutes) and issues in the campaign (just over 6 minutes). In fact, as a percentage of political story time, WTXF was the overwhelming leader in that proportion (35%) among the stations. But that finding is tempered because its total political story time was only 19 minutes. WPSG used most of its 17 minutes of total political story time for the candidate campaign type of story (11 minutes). It presented no stories about issue in the

campaign. That was the case also for WPHL, even though the station presented just over three minutes in total political story time.

Fig 15: Distribution of political story time by type & station



Political issue stories

The ten political stories that focused on an issue in the campaign were presented on the network affiliates and most of them (7) were broadcast in the last week of the campaign. The ten stories accounted for 1122 seconds (18.7 minutes) of broadcast time across the stations over the course of nine weeks. WCAU accounted for exactly half of them. In chronological order: one story examined the importance of school funding in the Pennsylvania governor's race (Oct. 1 for 35 seconds at 6am); one story reported on a study about the voter ID law (Oct. 9 for 29 seconds at 6am); one story addressed the issues and candidates in the 2014 election (Oct. 29 for 145 seconds at 6pm), one story examined the national significance of the Pennsylvania governor's race (Nov 3 for 83 seconds at 6am) and one story examined the possible midterm election turnout (Nov 3 for 75 seconds at 6am). WTXF presented one story about the claims regarding education spending under Corbett (Nov. 3 for 202 seconds at 5pm). But the majority of that same story was repeated one hour later at 6pm for 176 seconds). The station also broadcast a story addressing the political ad attacks in the race for governor (Nov. 3 for 173 seconds). KYW presented a story on Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams' creation of an election fraud task force (Nov. 3 for 32 seconds). WPVI broadcast a story examining voter turnout issues (Nov 3 for 172 seconds).

We were inclusive in the specification of a political story in order to give the benefit of the doubt to the stations. That said, we re-examined the stories that

were coded as public issues (apart from the political campaign stories) to determine if any of them could be seen within the context of the campaign. There was one such story, and, although it did not focus on the campaign, it did report a protest by citizens who supported more school funding. It was broadcast by WPVI on Sept. 8 for 166 seconds.

It is important to consider the ten political issue stories in the context of the number of political ads (n=1,747) that were shown on the sample broadcasts. Remember, political issue stories were those that directly addressed an issue raised in the campaign by the candidates. They were the stories that had the most potential to question the claims that were made on the ads. However, the ratio of the frequency between political ads and political issue

The **ratio** of the number of political ads to political stories that **addressed issues** raised in the ads was **174 to 1**.

stories was 174 to 1. If we extend the analysis to the time devoted to political ads on the sample broadcasts (842 minutes) and to political issue stories (18.7 minutes), the ratio becomes 45 to 1. That is, the stations devoted 45 times more time to political ads than to political issue stories.

Conclusion

Our research was directed at examining political ads and the content of local television news during an election campaign period. Specifically, we wanted to learn about the political ads and the political stories that might critically examine the claims on the ads that were presented on the newscasts. By the numbers, it was no contest. Political ads vastly outnumbered political stories of any kind and that difference was monumental when it came to political stories that addressed any of the public issues that were raised in the ads.

In Philadelphia during the midterm election of 2014, political communication was almost exclusively the province of paid advertisers. And, by definition,

Journalism never had a fighting chance. their message was always slanted to emphasize the positive aspects of their candidate and to point out the negative attributes of their opponents. There were so many of them that, in some ways, journalism never had a fighting chance.

It is important to note that television stations are restricted by law from censoring political ads if they are “uses”. That is defined as an ad that is “sponsored by a legally qualified candidate or the candidate’s campaign committee, that includes a recognizable likeness of the candidate” (Montero, 2015). Without the power to censor or reject a “use” ad, the broadcaster faces no liability for the ad’s content. But, the censoring prohibition only applies to “use” ads. The ads from parties other than candidates enjoy no such prohibition. Television stations can censor, or even legally reject, ads due to their content that are sponsored by PACs, labor unions and other advocacy groups. But, even though broadcasters may be liable for the content of these ads, they rarely reject them because they do not want to be seen as the “arbiter of what ads are truthful enough to be run and which should be rejected. In the political world, truth is often in the eyes of the beholder” (Montero, 2012). Therefore, determining whether the ad is “truthful” is a difficult task and broadcasters are not inclined to reject ads, preferring instead to leave it to the “marketplace” to produce a competing version of the issue. Perhaps, of course, it could be an ad that the broadcaster would gladly present on air---for a price.

Political ads have been a structural feature of American politics since the beginning of the republic. However, as we have developed more far-reaching methods of communication, they have become more prominent in the arsenal

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that candidates and advocates use to advance their positions. With the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon*, political ads have virtually taken over what citizens know and learn about campaign political issues and candidates.

We do know that the trend will continue. It is estimated that during the 2016 Presidential campaign the candidates will spend \$5 billion (Parnes & Cirilli, 2015). That seems to be a reasonable estimate as David and Charles Koch have announced that they will spend \$889 million during the 2016 Presidential campaign. That puts them on par with the major political parties as a player in the campaign (Fox, 2015).

The 2016 election will “almost certainly be a bonanza for local TV” (Fox, 2015). Tribune Media Peter Liguori chief is almost giddy with anticipation. In 2012, Tribune realized over \$150 million in political advertising. Liguori announced that, “we are going to crush that in 2016” (Littleton, 2015). Tribune, after an acquisition of Local TV LLC in 2012, now controls 42 stations, including multiple stations in swing states such as Ohio, Illinois and Pennsylvania (Littleton, 2015). Liguori continues:

We’re going to have two rounds of robust advertising. In some of those markets we have three stations. (Spending) in California could approach \$1 billion We’re going to take advantage of that (Littleton, 2015)

Liguori’s optimism and the prediction of a local TV bonanza are borne out by our recent history. In 2012, 87 percent of the combined Presidential local TV “spend” was directed at broadcast television versus 13 percent for local cable (TVB, 2014). Between 2008 and 2012, political ad spending for local broadcast TV increased by almost 90 percent (TVB, 2014). That is so because local TV has distinct advantages for candidates at both the national and local levels. In addition to the growth stated above, TVB articulates three other features of local broadcast TV that make it the prime vehicle for political ads:

1. Smaller competitive markets are a plus for local broadcast TV because ads will be more affordable to candidates and PACs. Further, many smaller market Congressional Districts fall across multiple DMAs, further benefiting the local TV option;
2. Local broadcast news is key because its audience still comprises the highest density of voters;

3. Local broadcast TV targets and delivers voters as TV stations can target voters by program, daypart and genre. Local TV reaches the entire market whereas, on average, cable only reaches 44 percent of the audience. Therefore, local broadcast news is able to out-deliver cable by wide margins. (TVB, 2014).

The effect of these advantages has already been realized by the largest local television station owners in the country. The Gannett Company controls 46 stations and its political advertising revenue was over \$92 million in the fourth quarter of 2014, part of an 117% increase in broadcast revenue (Fox, 2015). Sinclair is the largest local television station group. It owns, or controls through service agreements, 167 stations in 79 different media markets. In the fourth quarter of 2014 its political ad revenue reached over \$80 million as part of its \$130 million political ad revenue in 2014. To put that into perspective, its political ad revenue in 2006 was \$30 million. The 2014 revenue represented a 433% increase (Fox, 2015). And, where did this money go? For the most part, it went to acquisitions and paying back dividends to shareholders (Fox, 2015).

Our examination brings us to crucial facts. First, there is more money in political campaigns than ever before. The overwhelming majority of it goes to the owners of local television stations who, if history is any guide, will realize significant increases in revenue. Second, local TV station owners accept that money in exchange for broadcasting an onslaught of political ads on their news programs. Third, the political ads vastly outnumber political news stories on the broadcasts by a ratio of 9 to 1. Fourth, stations have made no investment in producing stories that critically examine the ads that appear on their air.

What does this mean for political communication and for what citizens learn about the candidates and advocates who vie for their attention, support, and money?

The short answer is that **political reality is bought.**

The short answer is that political reality is bought. Political ads spout their versions of the truth and, with all that money, the sponsors make their claims over and over again. The repetition works. But, there seems

to be a perverse calculus in play. Stations make ever increasing profits from content that, by its very nature, does not represent a neutral reality. That is the right of the political advertisers. But, the station owners' public interest obligation as license holders should press them to offer critical analyses of that very content. Local television journalism, either by incapacity or unwillingness, did not challenge those claims. In so doing, citizens were left to their own devices to ferret out fact from fiction. But, their devices are fundamentally dependent on an active and challenging press. The democracy that we have

established depends on that very arrangement. Which citizen can follow a candidate around to determine if her actions match the positions she espouses on her ads? Which citizen can file a claim for public information to verify one or another reality? Which citizen can take the place of journalism? It is true that citizenship requires effort. It should. But the extent to which we allow political reality to be dominated by those who have the resources to do so, to that extent we make the task of citizenship for the rest of us nearly impossible to accomplish.

Local television, either by incapacity or unwillingness, **did not challenge** those claims.

Appendix 1: Number of broadcast categories by station

	WPVI	WCAU	KYW	WTXF	WPSG	WPHL	TOTAL
Commercials	952	688	752	552	273	163	3380
Crime	632	564	433	497	246	133	2505
Wthr/Sprts/Trfc	538	436	504	268	377	81	2204
Promo	591	473	450	390	208	87	2199
Hum interest	587	355	453	363	201	105	2064
Pol ads	425	443	479	301	16	83	1747
Public issue	284	280	192	170	117	62	1105
Accident/ Disaster/Fire	217	195	186	137	107	38	880
Health	225	193	163	127	64	33	805
Bus/Economy/ Jobs	151	126	89	63	62	22	513
International (not Iraq, etc.)	62	78	32	44	29	7	252
Education	59	55	27	26	14	10	191
Political stories	47	73	29	16	19	6	190
Iraq/Syria/ Afghan/Iran	44	40	38	31	18	4	175
Environment	5	10	8	3	0	0	26
Total	4819	4009	3835	2988	1751	834	18236

Appendix 2: Proportion of broadcast time by broadcast categories by station (%)

	WPVI	WCAU	KYW	WTFX	WPSG	WPHL
Commercials	25.0%	22.9%	23.3%	25.2%	24.5%	28.6%
Crime	11.5%	12.7%	11.1%	16.6%	11.3%	13.1%
Wthr/Sprts/Trfc	11.9%	8.4%	11.8%	13.4%	13.3%	11.1%
Promo	23.6%	20.3%	23.0%	15.7%	27.8%	22.2%
Hum interest	7.0%	6.8%	7.6%	7.7%	6.3%	5.9%
Pol ads	4.2%	5.8%	6.1%	5.0%	0.4%	5.0%
Public issue	2.8%	3.4%	3.1%	3.1%	3.5%	2.5%
Accident/Disaster/ Fire	5.2%	6.3%	5.7%	5.0%	3.8%	3.6%
Health	2.5%	4.1%	2.9%	3.2%	2.6%	3.3%
Bus/Economy/Jobs	2.6%	3.2%	2.2%	2.1%	2.9%	2.5%
International (not Iraq, etc.)	0.8%	1.1%	0.6%	0.8%	1.1%	0.7%
Education	0.9%	1.3%	0.8%	0.9%	0.7%	0.8%
Political stories	1.0%	2.5%	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.4%
Iraq/Syria/Afghan/ Iran	0.7%	1.0%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	0.4%
Environment	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

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